

face of the planet, which is a nation of immigrants.

For far too long, however, the need to reform our obsolete immigration system has been a low priority for the House leadership. It has been, essentially, on the back burner. Americans have said loud and clear that they want Congress to act on comprehensive immigration reform, and it doesn't seem to matter whom we talk to. For people on the left and the right, across the different regions of this country, the need for immigration reform is increasingly clear, not just because it reflects our values, but because many see it as in our vital economic interest that we reform our obsolete immigration policies and return to the values that made this country so great. It is that welcoming value, that value that says: Come here. Be a part of this Nation. Help grow it. Help build it, and help contribute to its productivity.

Last year, when immigration reform was, obviously, coming before us because so many Members were expressing the need for it, we heard the Speaker say that the Senate should act first and that he would await Senate action before bringing comprehensive immigration reform to the floor of the House of Representatives. Last year, the Senate acted. The Senate acted in a bipartisan fashion by a vote of 68-32 and passed comprehensive immigration reform. It was not a perfect piece of legislation—none of them are—but they passed comprehensive immigration reform, which is something that people in this country have been asking for for a long time.

But nothing. Nothing was brought to the House. In fact, while we had immigration reform ready to go—we have a bipartisan bill here in the House of Representatives—silence from the leadership on the Republican side.

Then earlier this year, in January, the Speaker said that, once he had been able to present to his Conference the principles by which the Republican Conference would pursue comprehensive immigration reform, we would be able to then turn to this question and move forward on what the American people have been asking for for a long time. That was in January. Next week, it is April, and the House and the American people still wait.

There is overwhelming support for comprehensive immigration reform. It comes from labor. It comes from our business community. It comes from the agriculture community. It is so rare that we have an issue like this that is number one fundamental to who we are as Americans, and it is so rare that we have an issue that unites the people who very often on this very floor have their differences manifest in the debates of Congress. Now we have an issue that is consistent with our history, that is consistent with our values, and that is supported by big and small businesses, by agriculture interests, by organized labor, by Democrats and Republicans.

It is long overdue. It is time for us to get about the business of the American people and to take immigration reform up now.

IMMIGRATION REFORM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. POLIS) for 5 minutes.

Mr. POLIS. I come before this body today, Madam Speaker, to address the urgent need for passing immigration reform and finally replacing our broken immigration system with one that secures the rule of law, that secures our Nation's borders, and that ensures that we fix this problem and issue going forward.

Look, nobody is happy with how things are today with regards to immigration. Why should we be? We should, in fact, be ashamed as a country to look ourselves in the face and say: We are a country in which we don't even know who is here. There could be 10 million people or 15 million people here illegally. We don't enforce the law at workplaces. There is no mandatory workplace authentication. We are not serious about border security. These are the things that the Senate bill and H.R. 15 would remedy.

We have an unprecedented level of investment in border security. We make sure that businesses verify every employee who goes to work in order to ensure that one is there legally to work. We make sure the people we need in our economy to work and have jobs are able to get the permission to go to work the next day. H.R. 15 would create over 150,000 jobs for American citizens. It would reduce our budget deficit by \$200 billion. It would secure our border, reflect our values as a nation of immigrants and as a nation of laws with an immigration system that makes sense for our country, that makes sense for American citizens, that makes sense for reducing our budget deficit, and that works—fundamentally works—to help make America more competitive.

That is why there is an unprecedented coalition around H.R. 15, our comprehensive bipartisan immigration reform bill. It is a coalition so strong that, if this bill were placed on the floor of the House tomorrow, it would pass.

It is a coalition that unites business and labor, a coalition that unites the agriculture industry with farmers and with farmworkers, a coalition that includes members of the faith-based community, from the evangelical traditions, to the Catholic tradition, to the Jewish tradition, to the Muslim tradition. The full diversity of faith in our country supports this bill and this approach to immigration reform.

It is a coalition that includes the technology community and that includes the innovators of tomorrow's economy. H.R. 15 includes entrepreneurship visas. It includes a route where high-skilled workers who are

trained at our universities with Ph.D.'s in engineering and math are able to stay in our country to deploy their talents here rather than our route of current dysfunction of an immigration system that forces them back to overseas countries where the jobs follow them.

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We want that talent here to make our country stronger. H.R. 15 does that.

We call upon the Speaker to move forward with bringing this bill to the floor. There has not been a single immigration bill considered by this House, and that is why moments from now my colleagues will be launching a discharge petition to bring H.R. 15, immigration reform, to the floor of this House.

Madam Speaker, you may ask, What is a discharge petition?

A discharge petition is a way that the membership of this body, the 435 fine men and women who make up the United States Congress, can go around a Speaker who is unwilling to schedule a bill for a vote, and we ourselves can schedule the bill for a vote.

Normally, the Speaker decides what bills are considered on this floor. But if 218 of 435 Members—that is half of this body, a majority of this body—sign a discharge petition, that bill will immediately come to the floor of the House for an up-or-down vote. And that is all we are asking, Madam Speaker.

We know that there are people in this body who might have heartfelt convictions against fixing our immigration system. They can vote their conscience, just as we vote ours. But when we have a majority of this body ready to act in concert with the Senate, in concert with the President, in harmony with over 75 percent of the American people who support fixing our immigration system, it is time to act.

No Speaker, no majority leader, should stand in the way of overwhelming opinion both inside this body and outside this body. The time for finally fixing our broken immigration system, replacing chaos with order, replacing unruliness with the rule of law, replacing a lack of certainty with security and certainty, and an investment in our future, is now.

I call upon all of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle, in the face of the failure of this body to act, to sign the discharge petition, take back control of this Chamber for a solid, commonsense majority of Democrats and Republicans who want immigration reform to pass now. We can do that simply by signing on the dotted line on the discharge petition, as I intend to do moments from now.

I call upon all my colleagues to sign the discharge petition and finally fix our broken immigration system.

BUILDING FUTURES RHODE ISLAND

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from

Rhode Island (Mr. CICILLINE) for 5 minutes.

Mr. CICILLINE. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize Building Futures, a Providence-based work training program that prepares Rhode Islanders for careers in the construction industry. This program has made a real difference in the lives of 145 Rhode Islanders by placing them in registered apprenticeships as bricklayers, carpenters, electricians, plumbers, and other construction trade apprenticeships. This success is due, in large part, to its dedicated and talented staff, led by director and founder Andrew Cortes.

I was pleased to stand with Andrew as mayor of Providence in 2007 to help launch Building Futures, which has become a national model for work training programs, and recently to be with him and many others to celebrate their success at Building Futures and to hear directly from so many who have benefited from this program who are now holding good-paying jobs in my State.

Addressing the skills gap is one of Rhode Island's and our Nation's most pressing challenges. We know that too many people are searching for good-paying jobs, but too often, even though they are hardworking, they lack the particular skills they need for the jobs that are available.

Building Futures is helping to restore opportunity by bridging the skills gap and strengthening Rhode Island's workforce. Today, I am proud to salute their efforts and congratulate them on a job well done.

IMMIGRATION REFORM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from California (Ms. LOFGREN) for 5 minutes.

Ms. LOFGREN. Madam Speaker, I think what we are engaging on today has the potential of being truly historic. We need a vote on immigration reform.

Several weeks ago, I was home in the district I represent. I go home every week. The Secretary of Commerce was visiting in Silicon Valley. She gave a good speech. After she finished her speech, she invited questions. The very first question was from a young man—a scientist—who said this:

I started a company. I am about to hire four Americans. But my visa is up next month. What am I supposed to do?

As I was talking to that young man, another young man came forward—another scientist who has just formed a company. He is about to go into a hiring mode, but his visa was about up.

So when you take a look and listen to the people in Silicon Valley saying we are going to lose jobs in America because we have a dysfunctional immigration system, that shows the problem that we have allowed to fester.

Recently, I met with farmers. They told me that they are not planting crops this year because they can't identify who is going to pick those crops.

About 80 percent of the migrant farmworkers in America are here without their proper documents. Do I think that is a good situation? No, I do not.

A number of years ago, when I chaired the Immigration Subcommittee, we had a wonderful witness, Dr. Richard Land, then the head of the Southern Baptist Convention, and this was his testimony. He said:

We had for many years two signs at the southern border. One sign said, "No Trespassing," and the other sign said, "Help Wanted."

Those farmworkers who are here picking the vegetables that we will enjoy at our meals responded to that "Help Wanted" sign.

Sometimes people say you should do it in the legal way. Get to the end of the line. And this is from someone who was a former immigration lawyer. I used to teach immigration law at the University of Santa Clara. The truth is, there is no line to get into. We have created a dysfunctional system that does not serve American interests.

H.R. 15 is not a perfect bill. No piece of legislation is. But it was a bill that attracted broad bipartisan support in the United States Senate.

This discharge petition says just one thing: Let's have a vote. Why would the Speaker of the House and the Republican leadership refuse to allow this body to have an up-or-down vote on that bill?

A discharge petition is something that has been in the rules of the House for many, many decades. It has been used occasionally in the past to actually un-bottle-up bills that the leadership didn't want the body to vote on. Most recently, campaign finance reform came to the floor of the House because of a discharge petition.

A lot of Members of the House say that they favor immigration reform. Here is an opportunity to hold every Member of this House accountable. If you favor reform of the immigration system, you should favor having an up-or-down vote on H.R. 15. If you favor an up-or-down vote, we expect you, no matter what your party designation, to sign this discharge petition so the House of Representatives may have an opportunity to address this question and vote "yes" or "no" on this bill.

I hope that members of the public who are aware of the need for immigration reform to reform a system that is not serving our economic interests, that is breaking up families and leaving children in foster care while their parents are deported, will call their Members of the House of Representatives and ask them to sign this discharge petition. It is in the rules. It is what we expect.

We need a vote.

IMMIGRATION REFORM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida (Mr. GARCIA) for 5 minutes.

Mr. GARCIA. Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleagues for

joining me here today, as well as those advocates tirelessly working for comprehensive immigration reform.

Nine months have passed since the Senate moved on a strongly bipartisan comprehensive immigration bill. In that time, we have heard nothing but excuses and empty promises from the Speaker.

Yesterday, the Congressional Budget Office confirmed what so many of us already know: immigration is a boon for our economy. It will reduce the deficit by nearly \$1 trillion, raise wages, and increase the Nation's productivity. It will make our country richer and create opportunity for all. But because the Speaker refuses to give us a vote, we have seen more families ripped apart, more jobs go overseas, and more people get stuck in a broken, outdated, and inefficient system.

We can't afford to wait any longer for this House to take up immigration reform. The time has come to move this forward.

Immigration reform isn't just the right thing to do, it is the smart thing to do. Our country needs it, the American people support it, and there are enough votes today in the House of Representatives to pass it.

I invite all my colleagues to join me in signing the discharge petition so we can finally bring immigration reform to a vote.

IMMIGRATION REFORM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California (Mr. CÁRDENAS) for 5 minutes.

Mr. CÁRDENAS. Madam Speaker, this week, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office told us that the bipartisan, comprehensive immigration reform legislation in this House, H.R. 15, will reduce the deficit by \$900 billion over the next 20 years—\$200 billion in the first decade alone.

In today's economy, immigration reform is a vital lifeblood. By adding 11 million to our workforce here in the United States, our economy will continue driving our recovery. This influx of workers will increase consumption, pushing businesses to grow and hire more employees to meet their new consumers' needs.

Thanks to the Congressional Budget Office's report, we are reminded that bringing 11 million hardworking men and women out of the shadows is not simply a moral battle, it is not only an attempt to legalize millions of hardworking people who are already here in our country, it is an opportunity for us to create employment for our fellow Americans. It will supercharge the economy of this great Nation.

I think it is important for all of America to understand that comprehensive immigration reform is the best thing that we can do for our economy. The economists have reminded us of that. But, unfortunately, ladies and gentlemen, what stands in the way is a